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By uc. NARA. Date 2-11-88

SUMMARY RECORD OF NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING NO. 548  
Wednesday, February 10, 1965, Cabinet Room, 2:10 P.M.

SUBJECT: Vietnam

(See attached list of participants)

NOTE: Minutes of a meeting of these participants prior to the arrival of the President are attached. (Tab A)

Secretary McNamara summarized for the President the latest information on the Viet Cong bombing of the enlisted men's barracks at Qui Nhon. As of that time, one U. S. soldier was known to be dead, 20 injured, and 20 missing. Presumably, the missing soldiers are buried under the rubble of the billet.

Mr. McGeorge Bundy summarized the discussion of the Council members prior to the President's arrival. A response to the Qui Nhon incident by the U. S. in some form is agreed by all present. However, there is a difference as to what the response should be. Some believe we should not launch another raid while Kosygin is in the Far East. Some feel an attack now might force the Chinese Communists and the Soviet Union together.

Acting Secretary Ball reported that the Soviet reaction to the earlier attack on North Vietnam had so far been mild. Mr. Kosygin is leaving for North Korea at 3:00 P.M. today our time. He probably will try to enlist the support of the North Koreans for the holding of the March 1 meeting of Communist Parties which the Soviets are planning despite Chinese Communist opposition. Kosygin is expected to stay two days in North Korea. U. S. Action now puts heavy pressure on the Soviets. We should hold off any reprisal action until Kosygin leaves the area. Ambassador Thompson added that our objective should be to avoid any deeper Soviet commitment to the North Vietnamese. If the Chinese Communist Air Force comes in in response to our retaliatory attack, very heavy pressure is put on the Soviets to come to the aid of the Vietnamese.

Secretary Dillon said he did not believe the Russians would make a major policy decision based on the whereabouts of Kosygin.

Mr. McGeorge Bundy pointed out that we cannot put ourself in the position of giving the Russians control over our actions by their moving Soviet diplomats from one place to another. If we take no action, the Soviets may think we are in fact a paper tiger.

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Director McCone said that to base our action on a possible Soviet reaction would be to lose sight of our objective which is to help the South Vietnamese overcome aggression.

Secretary McNamara said that Ambassador Taylor, the Joint Chiefs and the Department of Defense recommended a retaliatory strike today at daylight. He said we will soon be facing the difficulty of taking Phase II actions even though there are no incidents created by the Viet Cong. However, the Qui Nhon attack provides us an opportunity today to retaliate immediately. He explained to the President the targets in North Vietnam which could be hit today. They are: Target 14, the Thanh Hoa bridge, which he said he would discuss later; Target 24, the Chanh Hoa army barracks, and Target No. 53, the Phu Vam supply depot, as a weather alternative. In addition to these two U.S. targets, he recommended that Target No. 32, the Vu Con barracks, be struck by the Vietnamese Air Force, assisted by U.S. planes with Target No. 39, the Chap Le barracks, as a weather alternative. (See attached target map with descriptions.) (Tab B)

Mr. McGeorge Bundy said that at an appropriate time we could publicly announce that we had turned a corner and changed our policy but that no mention should be made now of such a decision.

The President stressed the importance of preventing any leaks to newspapers. He appealed to the patriotism of those present and asked the Heads of Departments and Agencies present to survey their departments to ensure that leaks were not coming from their subordinates.

In response to the President's question, the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral McDonald, said he agreed with Secretary McNamara's recommendation. From a military point of view there is no reason to delay a strike.

The President asked what our team in Saigon recommended. Secretary McNamara read parts of a message from General Westmoreland recommending (Tab C) immediate reprisals. (Copy attached) Mr. McGeorge Bundy said that, having talked to Ambassador Taylor recently, he could summarize his views as follows: Reprisals should be undertaken at once, not only to improve morale in South Vietnam but also to give a clear signal to the North Vietnamese. He would not think that Communist behavior would be basically changed if we decided to delay a U.S. strike.

Secretary McNamara said the United States has overwhelming air power in the Southeast Asia area. The Joint Chiefs do not want to add more military power to that already in the Western Pacific. However, he thought that we should move additional forces into the Southeast Asia area for political reasons. He

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suggested that rather than announce the movement of these forces into the area we could informally give the press the list of U.S. forces which have been placed on alert for short notice movement to the Western Pacific.

In response to the President's question, Secretary McNamara said about 130 planes would be used in the strike recommended for approval. He then said he would drop Target 14, the Thanh Hoa bridge, which is much further north than any of the other targets. He suggested that Target No. 53, the Phu Van Support Depot be put in the plan instead of the prestige bridge recommended earlier. He felt that three targets were needed, two for the United States and one for the Vietnamese Air Force to attack. In response to question, he said the targets were not related to the railroad system because damage done to railroad tracks could be easily repaired.

Secretary Ball suggested that today's retaliatory strike be limited to two targets.

The President interrupted to ask whether any casualties had been reported as a result of the earlier strike. Mr. McGeorge Bundy replied that Hanoi had given no casualty figures but merely admitted there had been a loss of life.

There followed a discussion as to whether the last raid by the South Vietnamese had been successful. Secretary McNamara reported that after-battle information revealed that the South Vietnamese planes had hit a target other than the one they were supposed to hit.

The President asked whether all those present agreed we should launch a retaliatory strike.

In response to the President's direct question, the Vice President said he had some doubts as to whether the strike should take place today or whether it should be delayed until Mr. Kosygin left the area. He had mixed feelings about whether we should retaliate as Secretary McNamara had recommended. He shared the State Department's view that Kosygin's presence in Hanoi or in the Far East limited our freedom of action.

Acting Secretary Ball repeated his view that our action should be cautious. He said the strike as now planned, i.e., deleting the Thanh Hoa bridge, minimized the effect on a possible Soviet reaction to the strike.

Ambassador Thompson recommended that the strike be delayed for a few days. He thought we should first give warning that the North Vietnamese must stop their aggressive action now or we would end the safe haven which they now have in North Vietnam. If they then continue their activities we should launch

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Phase II of our December plan for graduated military pressures.

McGeorge Bundy summarized briefly the latest U.S. intelligence estimate of Hanoi's reaction to a new U.S. air strike. (A copy is attached.) (Tab D)

The President suggested we discuss our position with the Soviet Ambassador, possibly sending a message to the Soviet officials as to why we have to react the way we are. McGeorge Bundy said Ambassador Dobrynin gave Ambassador Thompson yesterday a "personal" message from the Soviet Government which had a governmental rather than a personal tone.

The President asked whether we had any other channels of communication. He recalled the Seaborn channel. He was reminded of the conversations which are apparently being carried on informally by the French in Paris.

There followed a discussion of how much news should be made public following the air attack. The consensus was that we should not spell out in detail exactly what we had undertaken to do.

The President raised the question as to whether there should be Congressional consultation. He also asked whether the time had come for him to make a TV speech. He indicated his reluctance to state again what he had said many times previously.

The President then expressed an interest in any possible targets in South Vietnam. In response, Secretary McNamara said there were no worthwhile targets they had been able to find in South Vietnam.

Acting Secretary Ball said we must emphasize South Vietnam's participation in the air attacks. Selecting only two targets, one for U.S. forces and one for the South Vietnamese forces, meant that the operation would be smaller than previously planned. The two targets chosen were closer to the demarcation line and thus an attack on them would be less likely to pull in the MIG airplanes based in North Vietnam.

The President said it had been proper and necessary for us to go into great detail publicly about our first raid in order to reassure the press but he did not think it is necessary following the proposed strike. Public statements should be limited to a generalized description of the new strike.

The President received affirmative answers when he asked Director McCone, Secretary Dillon, and Director Rowan whether they agreed with the recommended strike plan. Mr. Moyers said he thought the strike should be made to meet domestic public opinion requirements.

McGeorge Bundy summarized the consensus that news of the new strike should be released Thursday in Saigon and that special emphasis should be given

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to the joint U. S. - South Vietnamese character of the action.

Secretary McNamara then proposed that the strike be limited to two targets and that the justification for the strike would be a public statement separate from a report of the action.

The President authorized execution of the strike plan as revised. (The execution ordered is attached.) (Tab E)

As the meeting broke up, the President reviewed a draft State Department telegram to Saigon giving Ambassador Taylor guidance on the political situation in South Vietnam. (Draft telegram attached.) (Tab F)

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